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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4596  
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RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3424  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0454  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2505  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7081  
RUEHBFI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4895  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001930

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2016  
TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM PREF MOPS CE  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN OPPOSITION LEADER: DEVELOPING PEACE  
OFFER WILL TAKE TIME

REF: A) COLOMBO 1896 B) COLOMBO 1895 C) COLOMBO 1920

Classified By: DCM James R. Moore for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Opposition leader Wickremesinghe told Ambassador on November 16 that he was gravely concerned about the deterioration in the human rights environment in the country following the assassination of Tamil MP Raviraj. He said the government had a "siege mentality" about charges from the international community about security forces' collusion in human rights violations. He feared a "big explosion" if the Tamil Tigers tried to launch a major attack or VIP assassination before the end of November. Wickremesinghe said the military dictated the government's security strategy, which was still based on trying to achieve military victory over the Tigers. While his party was working with the government to develop a package of constitutional reforms in order to make a peace offer to the Tigers, this would not be ready for some time. End summary.

GOVERNMENT "IN DENIAL" ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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¶12. (C) Ambassador and Pol Chief met with Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe at the latter's request. Wickremesinghe had called a few days earlier to express his concern over the ramifications of Tamil MP Raviraj's assassination (ref a). Wickremesinghe said he had spoken to President Rajapaksa recently, and that the President and government seemed to have a "siege mentality." They seemed preoccupied with fending off allegations regarding involvement by the security forces in abductions and other human rights abuses (ref b), rather than dealing with the human rights problems themselves. Ambassador agreed that the government appeared to be in denial about the charges.

¶13. (C) Wickremesinghe recited the litany of recent negative developments, including the shelling of Vakarai and the Raviraj assassination, and said he was deeply concerned about the climate of fear in the country. He cited the

intimidation of the media and veiled threats about further political assassinations. Wickremesinghe thought that rogue elements of the security forces were not just colluding with the so-called Karuna faction, but in some areas were actually operating under Karuna group cover.

¶4. (C) Ambassador said he was concerned that the government was headed for a "train wreck" over the human rights issue. The report of the soon to be constituted Commission of Inquiry was likely to be extremely critical. It was urgent that the government get out in front of the problem and take some remedial action now. Wickremesinghe said that the one of the first orders of business under the MoU between his United National Party (UNP) and the President's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) would be to constitute a legitimate Constitutional Council, which could then legally confirm Presidential appointments to other bodies such as the Human Rights Commission, which badly needed new and credible leadership.

WILL TAKE TIME TO CONSTRUCT A CONSENSUS PEACE PROPOSAL

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¶5. (C) Regarding the MoU between the two major parties, Wickremesinghe said a high-level commission was working on an options paper for future constitutional arrangements for Sri Lanka, but its report would probably not be ready before the end of November. In any case, this paper would list all possible options ) including keeping the current unitary state ) so it would not be able to help the situation on the ground in the short term. The Tigers would not in any way be satisfied with these options. He explained that the

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President nevertheless needed to follow this procedure to bring the various elements of the government camp along. In particular, he would need to appear to consult his former allies, the Sinhalese nationalist JVP, who were against any move away from the unitary state.

¶6. (C) On the state of the peace process, Wickremesinghe said he did not detect much interest on either side in negotiations. The Tigers were following a political strategy of using military actions to position themselves for talks. The government's policy was still dictated by the military, whose only strategy was to try to defeat the LTTE. Ambassador asked if another round of negotiations in January was realistic. Wickremesinghe observed that it was easier for either party to start new fighting than for both parties to decide to stop.

¶7. (C) Wickremesinghe noted reports that the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) would try to pull off a bold stroke before LTTE chief Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day speech on November 27. If there was a "big explosion," he said, "we won't be able to put the pieces back together." The Geneva talks had broken down over the A-9 highway to Jaffna, but if the situation were relatively peaceful, a deal involving opening of the A-9 in exchange for Tiger guarantees of the safety of the sea lanes might be possible.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: It is encouraging that Wickremesinghe is speaking on a regular basis with President Rajapaksa. It appears that their new relationship has yet to yield specific results. Wickremesinghe's timetable for developing a "southern consensus" on a peace offer is both less ambitious and more realistic than that the Foreign Minister discussed with us just days ago (ref c). Wickremesinghe shares our assessment, and that of the international community, on the deterioration in the human rights situation in the last several months. He told us he would address this with the President when he saw him later the same day.

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